DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 744 SO 031 329

AUTHOR Iram, Yaacov
TITLE Dialogue of Cultures: The Israeli Experience.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (43rd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 14-18, 1999).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Context; *Cultural Pluralism; Educational Benefits; Foreign Countries; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *Intellectual Disciplines
IDENTIFIERS *Bar Ilan University (Israel); *Israel; Peace Education; Program Objectives; Tolerance

ABSTRACT

The future of the Israeli society, like the future of all democratic, multicultural societies, will be determined by the ability to maintain a meaningful dialogue among its diverse groups: Jews and Arabs, immigrants from diverse cultures and socio-economic strata. This paper presents and analyzes an educational program to promote understanding and to advance meaningful acceptance and peaceful coexistence as an end result of a continuous dialogue among students of diverse cultures. The paper discusses how the dialogue among diverse cultures may take two forms, tolerance and pluralism. It describes the Israeli society's social cleavages and pluralistic composition, with many divisions in its Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority. The paper outlines the educational program (at Bar-Ilan University) known as Education for Human Values, Tolerance, and Peace. (BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 443 744

Dialogue of Cultures: The Israeli Experience.

by Yaacov Iram

SO 031 329

Yaacov Iram

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DIALOGUE OF CULTURES: THE ISRAELI EXPERIENCE

Professor Yaacov Iram

Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace
School of Education
Bar-Ilan University
Ramat-Gan 52900, Israel
and
Western Galilee College

Paper to be presented at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Annual Conference, University of Toronto, April 1999.

Dialogue of Cultures: The Israeli Experience

The challenges which face the Israeli society comprise the most vital issues which confront most democratic societies around the world. These are: living at peace with one's neighbors; learning to understand and accept fundamental cultural differences within one's own pluralistic society; and creating an environment in which basic human values are shared and respected. Within the Israeli context this means in addition, the economic, social and cultural integration of more than half a million recent immigrants who arrived in less than a decade, mainly from the former Soviet Union Republics, both European and Asiatic, and also from Africa-Ethiopia. The diversity of cultures in Israel was further diversified in wake of these recent waves of immigration. The future of the Israeli society, as is the future of all democratic, multicultural societies, will be determined by the ability to maintain a meaningful dialogue among the diverse groups: Jews and Arabs, immigrants from diverse cultures and socio-economic strata.

The aim of this paper is to present and analyze an educational program to promote understanding, and to advance a meaningful acceptance and peaceful coexistence as an end result of a continuous dialogue between students of diverse cultures.

Dialogue: Between Tolerance and Pluralism

Dialogue between diverse cultures may take two forms: tolerance and pluralism.

Tolerance implies willingness to tolerate a position, idea or behavior, which are expressed by one person but considered as wrong by another person. Nevertheless he acknowledges its existence, respecting the right and freedom of the other person to express the ideas and to conduct his life according to these ideas and beliefs. The tolerant may react in a "negative" - passive way, namely ignore or overlook views, which he objects to. He might also react in a "positive" - active manner by supporting and defending the right of another person to express ideas, which he might consider wrong.

Tolerance developed initially in religious societies where majority-minority patterns of interaction existed and tolerance was manifested by respecting the rights of minority groups or of individuals different in beliefs, views and behavior from those of the majority.

Pluralism developed in liberal-secular societies. Pluralism implies more than tolerance toward attitudes, views and modes of behavior, which deviate from those of the majority. These are viewed not only as tolerated but valuable, though different, and therefore both of the ideas and their supporters have to be respected.

The pluralistic attitude might also appear in a passive way, namely, a factual recognition of multiculturalism in a society, or could be expressed in an active-normative form of assigning equal value to the other's views.

The pluralist, as opposed to the tolerant is determined to get into a dialogue with those whose values are different from his.

Most societies and states are pluralistic nationally, religiously linguistically, culturally, ethnically and socio-economically. In order to achieve a state of peaceful coexistence instead of constant struggle, there is a need for a meaningful and continues dialogue leading to mutual acceptance and viewing cultural pluralism as a valuable asset to societies.

Sociologists and political scientists tend to speak of the Israeli society in terms of five social cleavages reflecting the five principal divisions: (1) social classes, (2) groups of origin (ethnicity), (3) religious Zionism, (4) ultra-orthodox communities, and (5) national minorities.

The most outstanding characteristics of the State of Israel is its being an immigrant society comprising immigrants from more than one hundred countries, cultures and languages, and its pluralistic nature.

Israel is an immigrant country which experienced very rapid growth of its population. Immigration accounted for more than 50 percent of the increase in Jewish population of Israel between 1948-1977 and more than 25 percent between 1972-1982. Indeed, Israel's ethnic composition, religious and cultural character, and its socio-economic structure were affected profoundly by the various waves of immigration, both before and after the establishment of the state in 1948. Immigration and its integration (*klitat aliyah*) continue to play an important role on Israel's national agenda.

Thus in 1998 Israel's population is estimated a close to six million (5,940,000) compared to 806,000 in May 1948,when the state of Israel was formally established. In the first decade of independence the growth rate was 8 percent annually, about 2 percent in the 80s and raised to more than 3 percent in the 90s with the waves of immigration from the former USSR. In 1997 Israel's population growth rate was 2.4 percent which is high compared to the growth rate in Europe which is 0 (ZPG) in many European countries and 1 percent in North America. Forty three percent of the growth of Israel's population since statehood stems from immigration.

Another and, of course, related feature of Israel is the pluralistic composition of its society. This

pluralism is evident in almost every aspect. Nationality - there is a Jewish majority (about 82% in 1996) and a non-Jewish, predominantly Arab, minority (about 18% in 1996). The non-Jewish minority is religiously diversified: Moslem, Druze, and Christian. Linguistically - Hebrew and Arabic are both official languages of the state. As a result of national, religious, and linguistic pluralism, separate educational systems emerged: Jewish, Arab, and Druze.

The Jewish majority is also diverse ethnically, religiously, culturally, and educationally. Ethnically -in the sense of country of origin, there is a division between "Orientals" or "Sephardim" (born in African, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries) and "Westerners" or "Ashkenazim" (born in America, Europe, and South Africa (Patai, 1971a: 85-86, 1971b: 864, 1971c: 1019-1020). Religiously - Israeli Jews are divided into "religious", namely, strict observers of Jewish practices and obligations, and "non-religious", namely, non-observers of religious commandments (Mitzvot) in daily life, although they may honor some Jewish customs. Culturally - the different ethnic groups brought with them from their countries of origin different customs, ceremonies, attitudes, values, and ways of life.

Educationally - differences in religious observance caused the development of three Jewish educational subsystems: State Education, State Religious Education, and Independent Education of Agudat Israel - an ultra-orthodox party that maintains its educational system under the category of "non-official recognized schools" of the State Education Law of 1953 (Stanner, 1963).

There have been alternating periods of harmonious cooperation and tension, co-existence and conflict between "Orientals" and "Ashkenazim" on issues of socio-economic equality and cultural identity, as well as between religious and non-religious Jews.

The heterogeneity of the Jewish majority within the Israeli society has raised a dilemma regarding the socio-cultural function of education: should education serve as a "melting pot", namely, assimilate the immigrants into the dominant ruling groups or rather an instrument to encourage social integration

within the pluralistic society and encourage cultural identity of the different groups. These two conflicting attitudes of monoculturalism vs. multiculturalism found expression in different strategies of immigrant absorption (Eisenstadt, 1967, 1975), as well as in educational policy (Iram, 1985, 1992).

The changing nature of immigration to Israel during the past fifty years, since 1948, has made it imperative to change cultural conceptions, strategies of absorption and also modification of educational policies. The educational absorption of immigrants by providing both quality and equality of educational opportunities for all and especially for "under-privileged" groups of immigrant children - Orientals in the 1950s and 1960s, immigrants from Asian republics of the U.S.S.R. (i.e., Georgians) in the 1970s, and Ethiopians in the 1980s - and 90s has been a major concern to politicians, educators, sociologists, political scientists and researchers. Also, the continuous flow of students of extremely diverse backgrounds posed a challenge to the integrity of the educational system, stimulating ideological, conceptual, administrative, pedagogical and curricular changes, and sometimes even radical transformation. The "Ethiopian phase" of educational absorption has raised again the issue of the proper balance between the need to preserve unique lifestyles and religious practices, which are different from those of Oriental and Western Jews, in order not to hinder the adjustment of the Ethiopian immigrants to the Israeli society. This brought to light the need to find right ways and proper means to strengthen the principle of cultural pluralism, which will enable fruitful coexistence between the uniqueness of various groups and the common elements and characteristics of the emerging Israeli society.

As for the Jewish/non-Jewish division, both sides favor "separation rather than integration" ... neither Arabs nor Jews are interested in integration in housing or education (Mar'i, 1978: 104). An Arab educator explains the reasons as follows:

> As a national minority, the Arabs perceive integration as threatening to their identity and to their way of life. Separation provides them with a feeling of togetherness and security and helps them avoid the dangers and threats of their identity [Mar'i, 1978: 97].

So far for the socio-cultural characteristics of the State. Now let us turn to Bar-Ilan University.

Bar-Ilan University: The second largest and fastest growing university in Israel enrolling more than 20,000 students in its main campus and its sponsored five regional colleges. It is the only religious institution of higher education in Israel and is committed to the inculcation of Jewish studies in addition to imparting universal-humanistic and scientific knowledge to its students.

And now, let us turn to the Josef Burg Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace.

The Dr. Josef Burg Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace was established in May 1995 at the Bar-Ilan University School of Education.

The mission of the Dr. Josef Burg Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace is to provide educators with the research, insight, and practical guidance in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding they must have in order to foster a meaningful future to the historic process of change and renewal that is taking place in Israel and throughout the globe today.

The Chair deals with these issues in workshops especially designed for teachers, university students and the public. It conducts seminars and national and international conferences, initiates and supports research in these areas and publishes its results. The Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace supports education in all aspects of building a strong, healthy, and democratic society based on the values of humanism and Judaism. These goals are promoted by investigating issues from mutual understanding and tolerance to the absorption of new immigrants and understanding ways in which

adolescents develop value structures. Each of these issues are of vital relevance to all democratic nations throughout the world.

The Chair has a three-fold mission in three widening circles.

The first is the inner Jewish circle or society, namely bridging the gap between socio-economic and ethnic groups (Sephardim & Ashkenazim) new immigrants and veterans; religious and secular; political right and left.

In the second circle are Jews and Israeli Arabs/Palestinians.

The third - Israelis and Palestinians and the Arab neighboring countries.

Before going into a detailed description of the chairs activities, it is important to provide a wider perspective. The challenges that face the State of Israel comprise the most vital issues, which confront most democratic societies around the world. Living at peace with one's neighbors; learning to tolerate and understand fundamental cultural differences within one's own pluralistic society; and creating an environment in which basic human values are shared and respected. Within the Israeli context this means in addition the economic, social, and cultural integration of more than half a million "olim", new immigrants, who have come in the last decade from the former Soviet Union Republics and Ethiopia.

The long term success of the difficult and fragile peace process between Israelis and Palestinians now underway is dependent in part on the education of our youth. It requires new philosophical, sociological, and psychological conceptualization. The future of Israel, and the future of all democratic nations, will be determined by the ability of the next generation to internalize an informed understanding of the meaning of human values, tolerance and peace.

Similar problems are faced by many nations, thus the Council of Ministers of Education of the European Union adopted in 1994 a resolution on "education for democracy, human rights, and

tolerance" The European ministers of education call for "education of youth to the values of tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity" in order to confront rising tendencies of intolerance.

In a similar vein, UNESCO declared 1995 as the "United Nations' Year for Tolerance". Its aim was to "strengthen public awareness to the threat to peace because of the lack of tolerance between nations, communities, and individuals".

1997 was declared as the "Europe Against Racism" year. (In May 1997 the Chair hosted a group of students from the European Union, winners of a contest against racism held in by the E.U. member states).

Israeli society is a dynamic mix of religious, cultural, ethnic, economic, social and national influences. Israel is learning to live with and understand these differences while confronting the issue of peace with its neighbors.

Extreme polarization within Israeli society, which intensified as the peace process with its Arab neighbor states progressed, resulted in an urgent need to establish the Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace.